

# SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

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## Rural High Rise

Small towns build better living.

*Loss. The word echoes through many rural communities in the form of disappearing jobs, declining population, empty buildings, lower tax revenues, uncertain leadership, and even vanishing heritage. Any of those indicators in a community can signal steady demise. But the USDA and land-grant partnership provides Extension, research, and teaching to help rural communities, businesses and people renew and build for the future.*

### Payoff

- **Community overhaul.** By the time rural residents decide to stop a downward economic spiral to save their community, the hardest part may be figuring out where to start. Facilitators trained by **North Dakota** Extension helped 93 communities strategically plan for the future. Design students at **Iowa State** helped 35 communities develop comprehensive plans for renovation. A foundation was established with **Purdue** Extension's help to get grants for public and private services projects in Brown County, Indiana. With almost \$4 million in grants to date, the foundation has built a YMCA and public library and provided support for youth associations and health clinics.
- **Keeping up appearances.** **West Virginia** Extension formed the First Impressions program to show communities how first-time visitors view them, and provide community design teams information for create development plans. In 2004, 13 communities adopted their improvement recommendations. **Prairie View A&M** Extension in Texas helped the Centerline Community Concerned Citizens Association improve its building's appearance. The nicer building made senior citizens' computer classes and youth mentoring programs more attractive. This effort led to five new jobs.
- **Helping agriculture helped economies.** If farmers don't make money, neither do rural communities. **Delaware** Extension taught Mid-Atlantic crop advisors how to guide farmers' management of nutrients, water, soil, and pests most efficiently. This training helped boost farm income in the six-state region by \$38 million over the past two years. Interest in grape production and wine making has surged recently because a few acres have the potential for high returns. **Cornell, Iowa State,** and

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**Maryland** Extension examined grape varieties, production techniques, and business plans, then helped local growers add 3,700 jobs in New York, almost triple the number of wineries in Iowa and boost acreage by 10 percent in Maryland, adding \$250,000 to that state's economy. Because U.S. tobacco support programs ended in 2004, **North Carolina A&T** Extension taught 100 farmers to grow alternative crops. Their seaberrys, arctic figs, herbs, and cut flowers earned more than \$100,000 in 2004.

- **Boosting existing business.** Businesses other than farming also help rural economies. Manufacturers looked to **Iowa State** Extension for ways to find and eliminate inefficiencies. About 5,000 employees were trained. One company reported \$595,000 in annual savings, and another developed three strategic plans and six streamlined projects that increased sales by \$4 million over a six-year period.
- **Small business blueprints.** Just as a community needs help developing a plan, rural residents also need resources to help their new business ideas materialize. **Nebraska** Extension's EDGE - Enhancing, Developing, and Growing Entrepreneurship program - has helped about 2,000 people transform their ideas in viable businesses over 10 years, with 70 percent reporting higher sales and 33 percent hiring additional employees. **Ohio** Extension targeted an Appalachian area with almost 3,800 hours of consulting to expand businesses and create jobs. That effort in 2003 brought \$415 million to a 10-county region. **Oregon State** Extension helped retrain workers losing their jobs because of an economic downturn. More than 200 trainees now are working in new jobs. Because business retention and job expansions are critical for rural Eastern Shore counties, **Maryland** Extension loaned \$13 million for the development of 60 manufacturing businesses.
- **Fresh ideas, new markets.** Realizing that used clothing is often thrown away in small communities, a **California** 4-H advisor taught Siskiyou County volunteers to make woven rugs, quilts, and decorator pillows from the surplus. The store they opened made \$14,000 in its first year, and all proceeds were given to the local hospice. **Arkansas** took small business to the world with global marketing support services. They provide one-on-one consulting and market research, and in 2004

added a Web-based tutorial for clients. In its 10 years, the global marketing service has assisted 150 companies which added an estimated 120 new jobs, \$3.4 million in labor income, and \$5.5 million in products.

- **Playtime profits.** **North Dakota** Extension helped establish a tourism association for rural businesses and presented workshops. More than 110 attendees said the information helped them make decisions about starting recreational businesses, and about 30 made changes to existing businesses. Farmers markets and pick-your-own excursions for consumers have boosted rural economies. **North Carolina A&T, Mississippi State, Georgia, and Alabama** Extension helped growers create markets and generate thousands of dollars for local economies. Asian vegetables were among the produce in Stokes County, N.C., where market income topped \$15,000 in 2004. The Washington County, Miss., market increased from six to 15 vendors in one year with each reporting daily sales of \$50-\$60. About 3,000 customers show up weekly at the Augusta, Ga., sale where 20 vendors totaled \$240,000 in 12 weeks. **Kentucky's** effort with Mennonite and Amish farmers saw 71 growers sell more than \$1.2 million through a produce auction.
- **People empowered.** Planning reached the personal level when **Louisiana** Extension taught home buyer education. Nine participants purchased a home and 14 others have begun the process. Similarly, **Purdue** Extension taught financial management to 20 people, 17 of whom are now purchasing a first home. Limited-resource families learned from **Georgia** Extension how to file income taxes free and saved nearly \$50,000 while obtaining some \$1.4 million in refunds.



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